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DISCLAIMER: The Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, UAE has prepared this report for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, the information provided might be dated, as some import requirements are subject to frequent change. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters ensure that all necessary customs clearance requirements have been verified with local authorities through your foreign importer before the sale conditions are finalized. Final import approval of any product is always subject to the rules and regulations as interpreted by the country of import at the time of product entry.

SECTION I: FOOD LAWS

Bahrain is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which also includes Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

GCC-Wide Developments

Food Standards: The Gulf Standards Organization (GSO) is comprised of senior standards officials from the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries and is responsible for developing food and other standards in the GCC. The GSO food standards committee, which is currently chaired by Qatar, has been actively updating food standards over the past two years. Based on the WTO notifications that have been reviewed thus far, the committee is working to harmonize existing standards with the guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius and other international organizations. However, in some cases, differences still exist between some of the proposed new standards and existing international guidelines.

In theory, each GCC member should notify the WTO of a proposed new standard. However, typically one or two member countries submit the notification. Consequently, interested parties who review these notifications should bear in mind that, while a notification may be submitted by a single GCC member, the proposed standard will likely eventually apply to all GCC member countries. Once a new standard is approved by the GSO food standards committee, each member country should officially adopt the standard, thus making it a domestic standard as well as a GSO standard.

In June 2007, GSO members approved two new standards to replace the existing food shelf life and labeling standards. The new standards bring the GCC into closer compliance with the guidelines of Codex Alimentarius and, for the most part, offer more flexible requirements for importing foods from foreign markets.

The GSO has created subcommittees to follow-up on other issues related to food.

1. Bio-technology subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by the UAE
2. Labeling subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by Oman.
3. Additives subcommittee that is chaired and hosted by Saudi Arabia

The GSO also, when the need arises, forms working groups to address specific issues. Currently, a group is working to develop a unified GCC Halal standard. The first part of the standard outlines general Halal requirements and was notified to the WTO by Bahrain. The second part of the standard is currently being developed and is expected to cover issues related to Halal certification.

Customs and Tariffs: In January 2003, the "GCC Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff" (UCL) was released. The UCL established a unified customs tariff of five percent on nearly all processed food products. Under the UCL, live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables,

some seafood, grains, flour, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from tariffs. It also established a single entry point policy. In other words, a product entering any GCC member market would pay the appropriate duty only at point of entry and would then be permitted duty free transit among GCC member countries. In practice, this policy is employed only with unopened containers transshipped between GCC markets. Partial shipments tend to be subject to the five percent import duty again in the country of destination. However, it is expected that all goods, even partial shipments from opened containers, will eventually receive single-entry treatment once customs procedures are fully unified within the next year or two.

Food Import Procedures: During 2007, the GCC Food Safety Committee developed a "Guide for Food Import Procedures for the GCC Countries." This guide is meant to unify the applied procedures for clearing food consignments as well as unifying the required import certificates for different types of foods. The intent is to help facilitate the movement of food products within the GCC once customs unification is fully implemented. The United States and a number of other countries commented extensively on this proposed set of procedures. Implementation of the requirements has been delayed as GCC members study the comments. GCC officials are currently planning to implement the requirements in early 2009.

Bahrain Developments

Bahrain is the only GCC country that has adopted, via the Ministry of Commerce decree No. 3 dated February 2004, the Codex General Standard for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods (Codex Stan 1-1985, Rev.1-1991) as a national standard. It is not yet clear if the revised GSO standards for labeling GSO 9/2007 and shelf life GSO 150/2007 will override this decree when eventually adopted by the Ministry of Commerce. If the new standard does override the previous decree, Arabic labeling will become mandatory for all food products as will production dating. A more likely scenario is that the Government of Bahrain will permit either Codex guidelines or GSO standards for product labeling and shelf life. The new standards are currently with the Legal Department of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for review. Officials state that it is just a matter of time before the standards officially approved.

The Public Health Directorate (PHD), Ministry of Health (MOH), in conjunction with the Directorate of Standards and Metrology, Ministry of Commerce (MOC) are responsible for formulating food regulations. The Directorate of Agencies and Industrial Property, MOC, is responsible for formulating and enforcing trademark and agency laws. The Directorate of Customs & Ports, Ministry of Finance and National Economy (MOFNE), is responsible for enforcing local agency laws. The Public Health Directorate, Food & Water Control Section (FWC), MOH, is responsible for enforcing food safety regulations. For example, the FWC is responsible for inspecting all imported fresh and processed food products, verifying compliance with label regulations and, if deemed necessary, drawing samples and laboratory testing the products.

The Food Safety Committee, an interagency committee composed of representatives from the MOH, the Directorate of Standards and Metrology, Director of Consumer Protection, MOC and the Directorate of Agriculture, Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Agriculture (MMAA), decides all food safety and control issues, including the imposition of product bans.

SECTION II: LABELING REQUIREMENTS

Bahrain currently follows Codex Alimentarius labeling guidelines. Consequently, unlike other GCC countries, production dating is not required. However, this could change once Bahrain

adopts GSO 9/2007 for labeling and GSO 150/2007 for shelf life. Currently, the food label must include on the original label or primary packaging with the following information:

1. Product and brand name
2. Ingredients and additives, in descending order of proportion
3. Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids)
4. Manufacturer's name and address
5. Country of Origin
6. Lot identification
7. Expiry date (best or sell by dates are also acceptable)
8. Instructions for use (if any)
9. Special storage, transportation and handling instructions

(Note: There are no local nutritional labeling requirements. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable.)

Original labels should be printed in Arabic, but exceptions do exist for small lots and ethnic foods. Bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g. Arabic/English). In addition, Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of Arabic or bilingual labels provided the sticker:

- Is extremely difficult to remove.
- Includes all label information.
- Does not cover the original label.
- Does not contradict information on the original label.

The sell by date must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. U.S. bar coding is not accepted in lieu of the expiration date. The expiration date must be printed in the following order, depending on the shelf life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf life of less than 3 months.
- Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 3 months.

Dates written in digit form are preferred. However, dates written using words such as "September 24, 2005" also are acceptable. American dating (month/day/year) is not acceptable and using it could result in the rejection of the products dated in such a manner.

Bahrain will pre-approve food labels prior to import. Pre-import approval is strongly encouraged since it can significantly speed import clearance, particularly for new-to-market products and brands. Consignments with minor labeling infractions may be granted a one-time waiver, if petitioned, provided the products are found to be safe for human consumption. Small consignments of 20 or less cartons, as well as ethnic food products, may be exempt from Arabic label requirements, provided prior authorization is obtained from the PHD/MOH.

Ministerial Order No. 2/1989 governs the importation of specialty food products, such as certain diet and health foods and foods for diabetics and infants. Under this order, all specialty foods must be pre-registered with the Directorate of Pharmacies and Drug Control, Ministry of Health, prior to import. Specialty food labels must contain detailed information regarding ingredients (e.g., vitamins, supplements, minerals, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams and instructions for use and proper storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable. There are no Recommended Daily Allowance label requirements.

Products shipped in bulk or institutional-sized containers are subject to all labeling requirements. Fresh produce cartons are exempt from Arabic language label requirements.

SECTION III: PACKAGING & CONTAINER REQUIREMENTS

General requirements for packaged special foods are covered under GS 654/1996, GS 839/97, and GS 1024/2000.

SECTION IV: FOOD ADDITIVE REGULATIONS

Bahrain's Minister of Commerce & Industry issued Decree No. 22, dated June 21, 2005, that approved Codex Standards CXS 192:1995 as the "General Standard on Food Additives and Class Names and the International Numbering System for Food Additives" and CXS 107:1998 as the "General Standard for Labeling of Food Additives When Sold as Such." The common name and index number of all food color additives contained in a product must be noted on the product label. European "E" numbers are accepted.

SECTION V: PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINATES

Bahrain's Minister of Commerce & Industry issued Decree No. 22, dated June 21, 2005, that approved Codex Standards CXS 193:1995 for "General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food" and CXS 229:1993 for "Analysis of Pesticide Residues and Recommended Methods" as national standards.

SECTION VI: OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

All meat and poultry products must be accompanied by an Islamic (Halal) slaughter certificate issued by an approved Islamic center in the country of origin.

All imported eggs must be individually stamped with the supplier name or country of origin.

Unofficially, poultry products are granted a 20 percent tolerance for salmonella bacteria. Inspection officials routinely test for salmonella and will reject a shipment if salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of samples taken.

Bahrain Standard 988/1998, which is identical to GS 988/1998, defines the permitted level of radioactivity in foodstuffs. Irradiated food products are permitted but the label must include the international irradiated foods logo. A certificate of irradiation type and level is required for these foods.

Bahrain health authorities randomly inspect food products in retail outlets. In addition to visually inspecting labels, samples are taken and analyzed to ensure that product ingredients match those listed on the label. This procedure is conducted without the knowledge of the importer. If a discrepancy is found, the importer is informed and the product removed from the market and destroyed at the importer's expense.

SECTION VII: OTHER SPECIFIC STANDARDS

"Sample" consignments face no special requirements. Samples destined for food shows or other types of promotional events are exempt from local label requirements. However, health certificates and invoices noting that the products are not for sale and are of no commercial value must accompany them.

Alcoholic beverages and pork, as well as food products containing alcohol or pork, are strictly regulated. For example, retail outlets can only sell pork products from special counters that

are clearly marked. Only four companies are licensed to import alcoholic beverages. These companies may retail the product directly through their own establishment or market to institutional end users, such as hotels and licensed restaurants. Supermarkets are prohibited from selling alcoholic beverages. Media are prohibited from advertising alcoholic products, although in-house promotion in a liquor store or licensed restaurant is permitted.

SECTION VIII: COPYRIGHT AND/OR TRADEMARK LAWS

Legislative Decree No. 10/1992, amended by Legislative Decree No. 8 of 1998, governs commercial agencies. Importation of a brand officially registered to a local agent is less strictly regulated than before. At present any trader may import a product that is registered in another firm's name, provided the registered agent is paid a commission, the maximum of which is 5 percent. The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) may reduce or even exempt the payment of any commission. The principal may terminate an existing agency agreement. The agent is responsible for proving to a grievance committee that his activities resulted in an apparent success in promoting the product. The Directorate of Customs and Ports will release a consignment only if imported by the registered agent or if the importer obtains written permission from the registered agent, after paying the commission. The MOC may waive this commission for certain products, if deemed in the public's interest.

The Agencies and Industrial Property Directorate of the Ministry of Commerce handles trademark registration, which usually can be completed within a short time. Although a foreign company can register its trademark directly with the directorate, usually a local, specialized accounting or law firm is retained to conduct such work.

SECTION IX: IMPORT PROCEDURES

Nearly all of Bahrain's food imports enter the country via the main port of Mina Salman, located in the capital, Manama. The port boasts state-of-the-art facilities and equipment. Imports from Saudi Arabia, a major supplier of food products to Bahrain, usually arrive via the 25-mile long King Fahad causeway, which links Bahrain to its neighbor. Bahrain International Airport also receives a considerable amount of food products, particularly fresh fruits and fresh vegetables, chilled meats and deli products.

Fresh products are usually cleared within 24 hours of arrival and all other food products within as little as two days to a week, depending on the type of laboratory analysis required.

The following documents are required for food imports:

- Commercial invoice
- Packing list
- Bill of Lading
- Health certificate from the country of origin
- Halal slaughter certificate (for meat, poultry and their products)
- Certified certificate of origin (see below)

A U.S./Arab chamber of commerce and the Bahrain Embassy, or one of its consulates, in the United States, must notarize the certificate of origin. Another Arab embassy or consulate may be used, if a Bahraini government mission is not located near the exporter. If no other Arab government mission is located near the exporter, a statement from the local American chamber of commerce will suffice. A U.S./Arab chamber of commerce, however, must still notarize the certificate of origin.

A consignment rejected for being unfit for human consumption must be re-exported (but not to another GCC country) or destroyed, normally within two to three months of arrival. Products denied entry due to labeling infractions may later be cleared upon appeal, provided the infraction was minor. New-to-market and ethnic food products with minor labeling infractions have been cleared for import on a one-time basis. Serious labeling infractions will result in rejection of a shipment with no real chance of successful appeal. Major labeling infractions include: label tampering, missing or incorrectly printed expiry date or date printed on the sticker rather than original label/package.

Bahrain applies 100 percent inspection on new-to-market products, high risk products and products that failed a previous inspection. All other products are subject to a random sampling review that does include a laboratory analysis periodically.

In January 2003, Bahrain implemented the "GCC Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff" (UCL). The UCL established a unified customs tariff of five percent on practically all processed food products. Under the UCL, live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, grains, flours, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from any import duty. During 2006, Bahrain signed a Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Food products of U.S. origin that remain in Bahrain are exempt from the five percent GCC tariff.

The Directorate of Agriculture, MMAA, inspects live animals and plants, feedstuffs and horticultural products at the port of entry.

APPENDIX I: GOVERNMENT REGULATORY AGENCY CONTACTS**I. Ministry Of Health**

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Veterinary regulations

Livestock and pet import licensing

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All standards, including food standards

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